

Board of Education of the

City of Chicago

In Re: The Matter of the Proposal

To Close Stockton Elementary School

Heard Before

Judge Charles R. Winkler (ret.)

An Independent Hearing Officer

Report of the proceedings held on April 16, 2013 (8:00 P.M. – 10:00 P.M.) in the hearing room of the Chicago Board of Education at 125 S. Clark Street, Chicago.

Included herein are summaries of the statements of the 24 people who testified at the hearing. In addition, the hearing officer reviewed the transcripts of the community hearings conducted at Amunsen High School April 8, 2013 and April 11, 2013 regarding the same subject matter.

After reviewing the above, the hearing officer will set forth his findings and recommendations.

### **Introduction**

At 8:00 P.M. on Tuesday, April 16, 2013, a hearing convened at the Board of Education of the City of Chicago, 125 South Clark Street, Chicago, Illinois. The purpose of the hearing was to enable the hearing officer to receive public comments from concerned persons, specifically including representatives of the CEO, members of the local school council, parents of the schools' students, members of the staffs, the Principals and students, concerning the CEO's proposed Closing of Stockton Elementary

School, located at 4420 N. Beacon Street. The proposal also includes the relocation of the students to Courtenay Elementary School located at 4521 N. Clarendon Avenue. Parents of students at Stockton will also be given the option of selecting other CPS schools to best meet the student learning needs.

Approximately 39 individuals attended the Public Hearing, not including representatives from CPS. Approximately 21 individuals signed in to make public comments on the CEO's proposal, and everyone who wanted to make a public comment did in fact testify.

The undersigned summarized below the input received relevant to the issue of whether the CEO's proposal that Stockton be closed and the students relocated to Courtenay at the end of the current school year is justified, predicated on the law and facts as presented and considered by the Hearing Officer.

On behalf of CPS, Jennifer L. Chan, assistant General Counsel for the Board of Education of CPS, made an opening statement. She offered in evidence documents in a binder that was marked Exhibit #1 and the Hearing Officer received it in evidence.

Benjamin Felton, Chief Portfolio Officer for CPS, read into the record the results of studies supporting the proposal as set forth in Exhibit #1. Craig Benes, Chief of Schools for Ravenswood Elementary, followed with his report detailing how the proposal would be executed. In response to the Hearing Officer's question regarding safety concerns, Mr. Benes stated that the specific plans are to be worked out with the CPS and it would take 90 to 100 days to do so.

Twenty-one people spoke at the hearing.

1 and 2. Tammy Lunetto, Asst. Principal at Courtenay, spoke with no. 2. Jill Besenjak, Principal at Stockton: Ms. Besenjak said that the loss of jobs at Courtenay is devastating, the schools are very special and we will do our best to bring the best of both schools together. Ms. Lunetto said she worked at both schools and both have many positive aspects to bring together and both have excellent teachers and staff. If the CPS proposal is approved, both schools will have a huge job ahead. It is imperative that we receive support and resources. All the challenges to come will result positively in bringing character and forging new friendships

3. Damaris Woodbury, teacher at Stockton: We don't want to see Stockton close and the loss of jobs. If the proposals are okayed, we are committed to working with the Courtenay teachers. We need the highest quality of transition personnel.

4. Martin Ritter: Martin Ritter, organizer for Chicago Teachers Union and former teacher at Marshall and Hyde Park High School, has a Masters Degree in Education Leadership. He stated that the highly qualified teachers from Stewart follow their students to Brennemann, that highly trained social workers, clinicians and other mental health workers follow the kids and the number of clinicians be increased to support the Stewart kids.

Mr. Ritter questioned the one million dollar budget of CPS, the moving of 40,000 plus students, the chief administrative officers of CPS not moving their own children and suggested that the people at the Board of Trade and the Mercantile Exchange making billions should pay their fare share. All the dollars spend on Courtenay and Stockton highbred school security could be spent on lowering class sizes.

5. Symantha Landcastere: She is concerned about the safety of the children mentioning the south side killings in other neighborhoods.

6. Patricia Crumley, parent at Courtenay, supports the transfer. My husband and I think "this is a fabulous opportunity."

7. Claudia Pesenti, teacher at Stockton, opposes the closing of Stewart. She stated that we will lose our music room and our science and art labs. She is also concerned about indoor recess and several other matters.

8. Wendy Affant, parent of a Courtenay student: The action of CPS feels like a school closing. CPS has not provided the Courtenay community with a forum. CPS does not value community.

9. Cynthia Heywood, math teacher at Courtenay: In a perfect world, all of the teachers would be employed. I welcome the chance to win with the Stockton teachers. The reality of the situation is that Stockton will move into Courtenay. "We can make it a success."

10. Melanie Bienemann, parent: Her biggest concern is the special education for students at Stewart and Courtenay and the change taking place. Her daughter, Jeada, has needs and is not getting the help she needs.

11. Ramon Goggins, teacher at Courtenay, said we are going to work as hard as we can with the Stockton teachers to make the best for all students.

12. Corinna Chau, Courtenay parent: She has two children at Courtenay. She said the teachers, administrators and parents at the new school are going to make it work.

13. Taryn Kruta, parent at Courtenay: She gave the results of an informal survey from the community, the issues were class size, the transition plan, and safety. She is excited about bringing the kids to a larger facility with more amenities.

14. Wendy Katten, parent, expressed her concerns that CPS space utilization formula does not allow for schools with high special education populations as well as over crowding.

15. Catherine Reed: She made a short statement that Courtenay is a school that welcomes children city-wide.

16. Keti Tuthorn, parent of a Courtney student: Courtenay is a high performance, well utilized school. CPS is violating its own guidelines by its proposal to close Courtenay. She proposed several other plans to avoid CPS' proposal.

17. John James Humpherys, parent: CPS' notification to Courtenay was deceptive. Courtney is being closed because it will be occupied by other than Courtenay students. Mr. Humpherys calls it constructive dispossession of property.

18. Eugene DeRamos, parent at Courtenay, supports the proposal with reservations. He resides in Uptown and believes the area around Stockton to be safe.

19. Tonya Hunter, community member, concerned about who has the power, the people or the administration. If it's the administration, "we are wasting our time." She wants to know if there is a plan to ensure the CPS plan will be implemented.

20. Ignacio Vasquez, parent, has two children and is against the closing because the kids will not get the same amount of attention.

21. Jesus Gonzalez, parent at Stockton, has a 4 year old boy and is concerned about the takeover, about Stockton, and how the move will impact his son, stepson and niece.

In response to a question from the Hearing Officer, Jennifer L. Chan responded by email that CPS has proposed that 53 schools be closed and 32,500 students will be impacted by the closing. The number represents all pre K – 7 students in the proposed closing and welcoming schools. Approximately 14,400 are in the closing schools.

Exhibit #1 shows that enrollment at Stockton has declined by 17% in the last 10 years and the building is half full. Courtenay has better facilities and CPS has made a \$14.6 million recent facility investment.

#### **Community meeting on 4-8-13**

25 people made public comments at the first community meeting. Included in that number were Wendy Affant, Keti Tuthorn, Claudia Pesenti, Jesus Gonzalez, all of whom spoke at the final hearing 4-16-13.

Thank you for taking the extra time to express your concerns.

The following is a summary of the comments made by the 25 parents, teachers, administrators, and community members:

Courtenay should not be changed to a neighbor school; keep the lottery model; a one hundred percent lottery school is essential.

The proposal was not predicated on community feedback and should be invalidated.

Courtenay is the best environment for my children, small class size is in jeopardy. Stockton must stay open.

Special education students travel to Stockton. The schools have two different cultures. The plan is illogical and confusing. No one chose Courtenay for the amenities that are being offered at Stockton. Courtenay does not have a principal. The schools

have two different cultures. Barbara Byrd Bennette is living in a fog and is waging war on these communities.

One person who supported the proposal for the merger of the two schools stated it was a great idea.

### **2<sup>nd</sup> community meeting**

Thirty-seven people made public comments at the 2<sup>nd</sup> community meeting. Included in that number were: Eugene De Ramos, John James Humpherys, Melanie Bienemann, Cynthia Heywood, Corina Chou, Keeti Tuthorn, Taryn Kurth, Jesus Gonzalez, and Claudia Pesanti.

Thank you for taking the extra time to express your concerns.

The following is a summary of the comments made by the teachers, administrators, parents, Alderman Cappleman, and one student:

Poor and minority children show two times the improvement in small class settings. Concerns about safety; there are no safety programs at Courtenay. The proposal calling Courtenay a welcoming school is really a closing of Courtenay. There should be 100% open enrollment and no boundaries.

Keep the Courtenay model intact. Courtenay has been a lottery school for two years and should be kept open. By destroying everything that makes Courtenay, it is being punished for its success. They just closed the door on parents making this process a sham.

The kids at Courtenay are focused and supported to learn. Courtenay kids should go to Stockton because it's a better facility. CPS' plan in effect is closing two schools.

One hundred and thirty people have signed a petition questioning the proposal to change the enrollment policy. It should be a 100% lottery. The petition questioned the failure to provide an initial forum to discuss the action.

Other speakers raised the due process issue stating criminals get it, but teachers, students and parents don't. Many were concerned over special education services, pointing out that Stockton has 33% and Courtenay had 30% making it impossible to accommodate all.

CPS has failed to consider the effects of the proposal from the lives of the children.

Courtney does not meet the criteria: it's like putting the Cardinals in Wrigley Field. Our choice of schools is being taken away.

CPS has had five CEO's who do not fulfill promises. The Stockton students will not get any benefit from the proposal. One Stockton mother fears that Courtenay students will do something to her son.

CPS has plans to expand the charter system.

Alderman Cappleman does not support charter schools and will stand with those in opposition to see the kids get the education they deserve.

### **Those in support**

Six of the attendees supported the proposal. Here are some of their comments:

It's a good plan. Courtenay can take a good school plan to Stockton and help make Stockton better. Success relies on the parents, teachers, administrators, and students. The new entity has to have the ability to be a number one class school in the



near term. They have to make it happen. Both schools have phenomenal leadership, teachers and parents. Small class sizes support inclusion and show respect for all students. A Courtenay student said she is excited to make new friends and met new teachers.

### **Findings**

Exhibit #1 establishes the following:

Notice of the Public Hearing was served on the parents, teachers, staffs, Principals, and members of the Local School Councils of the affected schools via U. S. Mail, as required by Illinois law, and/or the Board's applicable Policies, Guidelines and Procedures.

Notice of the Hearings was also served via hand delivery to the schools. Finally, Notice of the Hearing was served upon the public by newspaper publication in the Chicago Sun-Times and Chicago Tribune Newspapers.

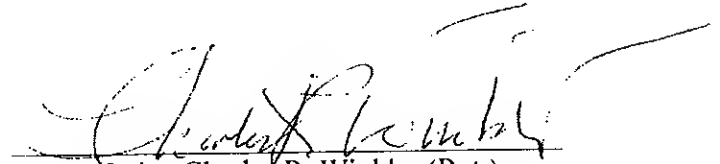
CPS has established it is entitled to proceed with its proposal. Part of the proposal includes a school safety plan to be in place within the next 90 to 100 days. This is to provide a smooth and safe transition for both the Stockton and Courtenay students.

### **Recommendations**

Since a definitive safety plan will not be ready until late August, 2013, CPS should consider delaying the implementation of the proposal until the 2014-2015 school year. The 475 Stockton students will be traveling a new route to a new school. Will an understaffed Chicago Police Department be able to provide enough officers to assist the Stewart children? Will CPS hire a private security company to furnish properly trained

personnel? Is there really enough time to get everyone up to speed so the 14,400 children from the closing schools are provided safe passage?

CPS should address and consider the plea to keep the Courtenay model intact: a 100% enrollment without boundaries.



Judge Charles R. Winkler (Ret.)